

MUSICAL GROWTH FINAL REFLECTION

This musical growth assignment has been a powerful journey full of amazing and unexpected opportunities and learning experiences. I believe that although this project did not turn out quite the way I had envisioned it to in September; I know that I have captured the intentions of the assignment. I want to take this reflection as an opportunity to share my story, the amazing experiences I have had this year, and the ways in which I have been able to grow as a musician and person.

Last April I made the decision to take some time away from playing and teaching music. Over the past few years of working as a professional musician –performing and teaching in many different settings- I became increasingly frustrated and extremely unfulfilled with my life, so I decided it was time for a change. I sold most of my equipment, cut my connections with the bands I was working with and also decided to stop teaching. I started working with my parents helping them build the family business and also made the decision to start upgrading my qualifications in order to allow me to not have to teach music after I graduated from Teachers College since this was no longer something I was interested in.

When we were asked to create our own Musical Growth Project I began to wrestle with a few ideas: study the history of South African music; learn how to play the flute and learn about arranging for gospel/Christian choirs. My initial thinking was to pick something that did not involve playing, practicing or performing as I really did not want to be away from music, however, this was not as easy as I had thought it would be. My time away from music gave me the opportunity to do some soul searching and during this time spiritual growth had become a focus in my life. I was raised a Catholic, however, for many years I had not acknowledged my faith as an integral part of my life. Coincidentally, during the time of having to choose our musical growth proposals, I had really been considering going back to church, so the thought of studying Christian/gospel choirs was something that I really became interested in. When I approached Doug about this, he strongly encouraged me to follow through with the idea. Shortly thereafter, I began attending weekly services at a Christian church in North York called The Church on the Queensway. I eventually approached the head Artistic director and explained to him that I was interested in learning about choirs and also about how the musicians operate within the church. Fortunately he was very welcoming.

During the months from October to December I attended six Worship Band rehearsals, where I observed the band, the music director and the choir. The following are my observations on how the band functions:

1. Musicians are assigned specific dates to perform. There is a team of musicians and they rotate depending on availability.
2. Two music directors decide what material will be performed at each service. There are two services per week: a more traditional service at 9:30am where the music is calmer and tailored to meet the taste of an older congregation and a non-traditional service at 11am. The music in the second service is a lot more modern.
3. Repertoire always reflects a particular message. For example, asking God to be close to us. The message is decided upon first, and then the songs are chosen to reflect that message.
4. By Tuesday of each week, the band and singers are emailed the set list with copies of lyric/chord charts as well as mp3's of the songs. The band/vocalists are to learn the material and prepare themselves for rehearsals which are held on the Thursday nights. During the rehearsal the band/vocalists work out the arrangement of the songs as well as the transitions from one song to the other.
5. The Worship Team at Church on the Queensway consists of the following:

- 20 singers -6 keyboard/piano players
- 4 guitarists - 1 electric violin
- 3 drummers - 2 bass players

During a regular Sunday service the band consists of:

- 6 singers (2 alto, 2 soprano and 2 tenor)
- 1-2 guitarists (if there are two guitarists one will play electric and the other acoustic. If there is just one, he will play electric)
- 1 bass player
- 1 drummer
- 1 piano and 1 keyboard player

There is either one or two singers who are the Worship leaders and they are responsible for singing lead as well as delivering the message of the Worship Service. They do this by speaking to the congregation and reciting Bible verses while the band vamps over a simple chord progression that has already been prepared. The Worship part of the service is between 20-25 minutes and takes place at the beginning.

During the second week of January I arranged for a private lesson with the assistant artistic director Jackie Benford to discuss vocal arranging. The following are the notes from that session:

Private Lesson Notes:

- example of song for reference: Hosanna by Kirk Franklin
- song starts with choir singing in unison for audience to grasp melody
- purpose is for interaction between choir and audience

Standard Arrangement of gospel tunes:

Verse- usually in unison

Chorus- 3-part harmony

*Contemporary Christian/gospel music has only 3-part vocals (soprano, tenor and alto)

*Traditional Christian/gospel music uses 4-part (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), bass usually sings root movement.

*more complex melodies are usually in unison.

In a typical contemporary setting, soprano sings the melody. Depending on the melody range, it is sometimes better to have the Alto's sing it.

Typical form:

Verse, Chorus, Verse, Chorus, Bridge (Vamp)

Flipping Harmonies: Where vocalists change their parts. This usually takes place at the end. During Bridge (Vamp) section. This usually involves moving the parts up. In professional settings this happens a lot. In most local church settings this doesn't always happen. It depends on the abilities of the vocalists.

Example of flipping harmonies: You Hold My World by Israel Houghton

During the end vamp the choir starts to flip harmonies. They start in unison, then go into 3-part harmony (tenor taking the melody), then they flip harmonies once, and then as it builds they flip a second time.

After New Years:

After the Christmas break I had stopped attending Worship Band rehearsals. However, I had rediscovered my passion for playing guitar and so I began learning some of the material that the Worship Band performs with the intentions of eventually becoming a member of the band. In February, I was asked by the Artistic directors to bring in my guitar and audition for them. The audition went well and by March I began performing with the band. I have performed at two services thus far and I am scheduled to perform twice during April as well.

These performances with the Worship Team have opened the door to two other incredible performance opportunities. I have been performing weekly as part of an acoustic band at a Young Adults group that the church runs on Sunday nights. The group consists of two vocalists, percussion and acoustic guitar. Our repertoire consists of worship material from contemporary Christian artists such as Chris Tomlin, Third Day, Hillsong and Israel Houghton among others. There are on average anywhere between 40-70 people that attend this group weekly.

I was also asked to play electric guitar as part of the orchestra for the Easter play that will take place the last two weeks of April. The orchestra consists of a seven piece rhythm section and a twelve piece horn section. The church has been performing this play for the last twenty years and it draws thousands of people each year. This year we are performing a total of seven shows.

Furthermore, I have been able to arrange for my final OISE internship to be done at the church. I will be assisting the Artistic Directors in organizing rehearsals, transcribing and notating music, performing with the Worship Team, and also assisting in organizing a Young Adults conference which will take place the first week of June.

Conclusion:

Overall, this past year has been a real learning experience for me. It has been filled with many unexpected opportunities, all of which have allowed me to grow both as an educator, but more importantly as a person. Doug, you have been an inspiration to me and you have pushed me to do things that have forced me to figure out who I am as a person while also fulfilling what was required of me academically. I want to conclude by briefly sharing with you my last practicum experience.

As you are aware, I had no intentions of applying for a job this year. However, this has all changed due to my last practicum experience. I spent the last month teaching grade 8 english and religion. During that time we did a novel study on a book about HIV/AIDS in Africa where we learned about the disease - what it is, how it is contracted, read Bible passages about Jesus' life and what He teaches us, and spent time celebrating our talents as a class through the Arts. I

created an open-ended final Arts assignment for my culminating task where I gave the students the opportunity to create their own assignment. My only instructions were that it had to connect to what we had been discussing during class. The last two days of my practicum were our presentations. However, during the month, I put myself out there like I had never done before. I have never sang and played guitar in public before and I did twice during the course of the practicum. I was open and honest with the students and worked each day to show them how much I cared about who they were as people. Those final two days of Arts presentations was something I will never forget. The students were incredible and I noticed the dynamic in the classroom change because of this. The students were able to see themselves in a different light as they felt like they were being praised for their unique talents and through this we were able to build a strong classroom community. It was an experience I will never forget and has made me really feel like I have something to offer as a teacher.

Thank you for being the teacher that you are Doug. Through this musical growth assignment and through the time I have spent in your class I have realized that teaching is all about connecting with people, celebrating their talents and providing students with opportunities for self discovery. That is where the real learning happens and I was able to experience the results of that first hand during this practicum. I am excited to see what the future holds for me both as a musician in my church and also as a teacher.

PROFESSIONAL MUSICAL GROWTH PROJECT

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EDU1231Y/1241Y: Intermediate Music

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